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NOTES FROM THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY:
FRANK BLACKMAR'S LAST YEARS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS*

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Frank Wilson Blackmar (1854-1931) has been described as "one of the master builders of the University of Kansas" and "an outstanding figure in the world of the social sciences." Despite Blackmar's many accomplishments, he is not well known by contemporary sociologists. This article briefly reviews his work as an academic and practitioner and then focuses on Blackmar's unsettling last years at the University of Kansas. This account of Blackmar's retirement is based on letters and memos found in the university archives.

As American sociology developed in the 1880s and 1890s, the country was struggling with issues of economic and social justice. Many of the early sociologists--academics as well as practitioners--were interested in solving or at least reducing the pressing problems confronting their communities. One of those scholar-practitioners was the University of Kansas' first sociologist, Frank Wilson Blackmar (1854-1931).

When Blackmar began his 40-year tenure at Kansas in 1889, as professor of history and sociology, times were more than difficult.¹ Waves of new settlers had entered the Kansas region after the Civil War and the combination of an increase in population, adverse national economic conditions and drought hit Kansas hard. The situation was so desperate for farmers "by 1895 that the University of Kansas faculty voted to contribute part of their salaries to aid sufferers in Western Kansas" (Clark 1965, p. 96).

Blackmar was, for 25 years, the first dean and "guiding genius" (Patterson 1931, p. 7) of the graduate school and headed the department of sociology for almost 30 years. Blackmar (Blackmar and Gillin 1924, p. 37) thought sociology's purpose was "first, to understand society; then to enable us to formulate a scientific program of social betterment." He taught some of the first sociology courses in the country--e.g., "Elements of Sociology" (1890), "Status of Woman" (1893), "Questions of Practical Sociology" (1897) and "Remedial and Corrective Agencies (1897)--and had a distinguished record as an academic and as a practitioner.

Blackmar was the author of more than 18 books and 90 articles and pamphlets including *The Study of History and Sociology* (1890), *History of Higher Education in Kansas* (1900), *The Elements of Sociology* (1905) and

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Outlines of Sociology (1924).² Among his other accomplishments: co-founder and ninth president of the American Sociological Society (1919); the organizer and first president of the Kansas Conference of Charities and Corrections; and organizer of local charity organizations throughout the state.

Blackmar established the first American university department with the word "sociology" in its official title³ (Blackmar 1927, p. 7; Vincent 1931, p. 503; Burgess 1932, p. 323) and he popularized social science knowledge through numerous public courses and lectures. He also served on four state prison commissions as well as on industrial school, mental hygiene, child welfare and city planning commissions. In addition, he penned the state's juvenile court law and child labor law. Blackmar has been described as "one of the master builders of the University of Kansas" (Patterson 1931, pp. 7-8) and "an outstanding figure in the world of the social sciences" (*Lawrence Journal World* 1931).

Despite Blackmar's many accomplishments, he is not well known by contemporary sociologists. There may be several reasons for this obscurity. Individual factors need to be considered. For one thing, his best-known written work was an introductory text (Burgess 1932, p. 324), the kind of book that has lasting value only under unusual circumstances. In addition, Blackmar wrote extensively, which is surprising considering his heavy administrative, teaching and community responsibilities, but his writing was not in one specialized area. We seem to remember the specialists.

Also, Blackmar's practice work was statewide rather than national or in one city, and he spent considerable time giving extension lectures. These activities often go uncredited and unrecorded by those writing the history of sociology.

Program factors need to be considered too. The sociology program that Blackmar built was not turning out many doctorates and research was not given the highest priority (Blackmar 1927, pp. 24-25). And there was no university press at Kansas publishing the work of sociology faculty and students.⁴ (The University of Chicago Press had an important role in promoting the interests and reputation of the Chicago sociology program.)

Part of the problem also is there has been little interest by sociologists in the history of their own field. In addition, many of those chronicling that history narrowly focused on the development of sociology as a quantitative science. This has led to an emphasis on certain individuals and institutions.

There was an early interest in following the development of the sociological practice⁵ tradition. That interest has reemerged in the 1980s (e.g., Glass and Fritz 1982; Fritz 1989a, 1990a, 1990b; Fritz and Clark 1989) but the information on this tradition is only beginning to appear in our general histories of the field. The revised histories will include information about some of the early University of Kansas sociologists--such as Frank Blackmar and Stuart Queen--because of their substantial involvement in practice activities.

Blackmar's contributions have been described or mentioned in several recent presentations and publications. University of Kansas sociologist Alan

Sica (1980, 1983), for example, has written two pieces discussing Blackmar. Jan Fritz and Elizabeth Clark (1989, pp. 186-88) recently reprinted Blackmar's 1914 article on curriculum in their *Sociological Practice: The Development of Clinical and Applied Sociology*. Blackmar's (1914, p. 263) piece was included in the issue because it showed his attempt to have the University of Kansas "ground sociology in general utility and social service." Blackmar wanted his department to emphasize social technology and social engineering in order to "reform social conditions and direct social movements by a well-organized system."

This article focuses on Blackmar's last years with the University of Kansas, when, at the age of 70, he faced a difficult situation. Blackmar wanted to continue his university work but the members of his department thought it was time for him to retire.

This account of Blackmar's last years as a faculty member is based on letters and memos found in the University's archives.⁶ Extensive quotes are provided so the reader will not only know of the events but learn in a direct way about the participants' concerns, styles and feelings.

Learning about encouraged or forced departures of sociologists from universities⁷ helps us understand the political and social climate at the time and calls attention to university procedures, retirement benefits and professional support for those who are asked or encouraged to leave.

NOTES ON BLACKMAR'S RETIREMENT

Alan Sica (1983), in a detailed piece about the development of the department of sociology at the University of Kansas, mentions Blackmar's retirement as chair of the sociology department. Sica simply is reporting what former faculty member Carroll Clark wrote about the event. Clark (n.d., p. 5), a full-time instructor during the 1925-26 academic year, wrote the following probably some twenty years after the period under discussion:

1925-1926 Blackmar's *History of Human Society* published. But Blackmar is forced to retire as Chairman after controversy when all other members of Department choose to use Park and Burgess as introductory text instead of Blackmar and Gillin...

During the mid-1960s, Clark (1965, p. 95) again wrote about the history of the department and Blackmar's retirement as chair:

In 1905, fifteen years after first giving the course (*Elements of Sociology*), Blackmar brought out the first edition of his own sociology text which bore the same title and was widely used for many years... (A) subsequent edition of this textbook was to prove a stormy petrel in the Department, leading to strife that the chairmanship of Blackmar could not survive.

It certainly may be true that Blackmar felt strongly about the use of his text. In a 1920 letter to the chancellor, Blackmar (1920, p. 3) had written:

Another very important thing concerning the Department of Sociology is that as a sociologist I stand more for the establishment of the scope and curriculum of Sociology in universities than perhaps for any other thing. So far as my sociological reputation in the United States is concerned, it is quite remarkable that a textbook of Sociology written by me and published in 1910 and revised in 1915 with aid of Associate Professor Gillin of the University of Wisconsin, has become the recognized standard text for universities and colleges in the United States. I am told that more than three-fourths of them use this text.⁸

The choice of book may have been a reason, but there also were other factors in the decision to replace Blackmar as chair of the department. This becomes clearer when we follow an exchange of letters written during a two-week period in March of 1925.

On March 17 all members of the sociology department (except Blackmar) signed a letter to E.H. Lindley, the university chancellor, as well as the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the dean of the Graduate School. The three-page letter was written by Stuart Queen, Victor Helleberg, Seba Eldridge, Delbert Mann and Carroll Clark.⁹ They stated, in part:

Prof. Blackmar does not supply the responsible and representative administration of Departmental affairs which is requisite to the efficiency and progressive development of the Department's service. Owing doubtless to traits of personality, he does not manifest a disposition to consider Departmental matters on their merits, but, on the contrary, rather consistently deals with such matters on the basis of personal interest, prejudice and bias...

His relationships with the individual members of the Department are similarly characterized. These relationships on his side are or have been variously characterized by favoritism, arbitrariness, duplicity and vindictiveness. He rather consistently attempts to intimidate members of the Department who go contrary to his own wishes... when it is thought that these tactics will work, and we have reason to believe that he attempts to discredit other members of the Department, when they do not fall in with his plans, by misrepresenting their work or their motives... He also seeks to terminate the services of members of the Department who are at all outspoken in their opposition to his wishes or his points of view. We have reason to believe, moreover, that in matters pertaining to the advancement of the members of the Department in rank or in salary, the facts upon the basis of which such matters should be considered by the administrative authorities

are not supplied by him, unless it happens to fall in with his personal interest or bias to give such facts.

We are unanimous in the further belief that Prof. Blackmar's teaching activities do not represent any great contribution to genuine instruction in our subject, or to the advancement of University interests generally. While we naturally have no great amount of direct evidence on this point, strong inferential evidence leaves no doubt as to the matter in our minds. His very obvious encouragement of excessively large enrollments in his courses, the fact that his courses are generally regarded as "snap courses," his emphasis on number of enrollments in the Department generally, his comparative indifference as to the quality of its instructional work, all point to this conclusion.

We realize that these are serious criticisms, but they have been carefully weighed by us in conference, and we have no doubt as to their correctness... We are all agreed that the best interests of the Department would be served by the retirement of Prof. Blackmar from further active service in the Department, after the present academic year. For the reasons stated above, the members of the Department have no confidence in and but little respect for him...

We would like to refer, in conclusion, to another matter, though it may not come within our province to do so. Although we believe that Prof. Blackmar should be speedily retired from active service in the Department, we think it would be unjust to do so, in consideration of his advanced years, his long tenure here and his present physical condition, without making such financial provision for his old age as may be feasible... (W)e would not wish the action we have recommended to occasion personal distress or serious financial embarrassment to one who has claims to our consideration.

Apparently unaware of the letter his colleagues had sent on March 17, Blackmar (March 19) wrote the following in his own letter to Chancellor Lindley:

You have admonished me to take good care of my health, which I certainly am doing and I am speedily coming to full recover(y) which I hope will insure me five or ten years of good work for K.U.

...I cannot help but feel that an advance in salary has been due me for several years because of the fact that the dollar which was appropriated for my salary is now worth only 60 cents...

I do not think it unreasonable to ask you now for an increase in salary... This is the first time I have asked for a raise in salary in my years of service at the University.

Later the same week, Blackmar sent his faculty a memo about an upcoming department meeting. Those who wrote on March 17 to the chancellor responded to Blackmar on March 25:

We note your call for a department meeting to be held Saturday morning at 10 o'clock, and assume that its purpose is to discuss the budget for next year. Since this involves personnel and salaries, we feel that this cannot be worked out until the matter of your retirement has first been settled. Perhaps it is only fair to you to say that the other members of the department are agreed that it is for the best interests of all concerned--your own as well as those of the department--that this retirement take place at the end of the present semester.

While we feel that it is important for various reasons that you be early relieved of the strenuous duties of a teacher and administrator, we are anxious that proper financial provision be made for you by the University which you have served so long.

By the end of March, the faculty members may have been informed by the administration--or perhaps by Blackmar--that their approach was inappropriate. On March 30 they wrote a somewhat conciliatory letter to Blackmar:

We should like with your approval to withdraw our letter of March 25, as not being based on a consideration of all the conditions involved in the situation and as perhaps indicating a line of action that might be inexpedient. We realize, of course, that the decision in this matter rests with the administrative authorities of the University. We hope that you will put the incident from your mind, so far as possible, and that you will speedily recover from the effects of your recent illness.

Blackmar was able to remain as head of the sociology department for another year, but he still wasn't ready to leave his university work. In a letter dated April 22, 1926, Blackmar wrote again to the chancellor:

During our conversation the other day you mentioned the fact that there was a committee of Regents appointed to consider retirements and expressed your desire to do something for the men who had given long and faithful service to the University. I believe I said that when the Regents had worked out a plan on retirement these men would probably be ready.

Regarding myself, I feel that it is necessary for me to continue in my present position on full-time and full salary for at least another year until I can round out the University work I have in mind and also adjust myself to personal economic conditions.

I am writing this merely to be sure that I made my attitude in this matter clear to you.

One month later, on May 24, 1926, Frank Blackmar submitted his resignation as head of the sociology department "with the understanding that I retain my professorship of sociology in the Department with a continuation of my present salary of \$4,000." Chancellor Lindley responded in a note typed on a copy of Blackmar's May 24 resignation letter:

In our conference the suggestion of full salary was for the ensuing year only, with such readjustment at the end of the year as would provide a half-time or retiring allowance, in recognition of your long and distinguished service to the University. If the above is not in accordance with your understanding, will you kindly advise me?

I shall be glad also to counsel with you concerning the chairmanship of the department for the next year.

Blackmar was not happy with the chancellor's reply and wrote him on June 7:

...(You) asked me if I would advise you as to my understanding of your statement regarding my resignation as Head of the Department of Sociology... To my mind the subject of my resignation as Head of the Department of Sociology and the question of my retiring from the University are two different propositions not necessarily connected. My resignation was made with the provision that I retain my professorship in the Department with the continuation of my present salary of \$4,000. If this is viewed in any other light, then I wish to withdraw my resignation. On the other hand, if it is accepted I expect to put a full measure of time in the field of instruction undiminished from last years work... I am in good health and prepared to do first-class work. Teaching has become, not a second nature to me, but my life work, indeed it is my life...

As to my retiring, I may say that I have a laudable and reasonable ambition to render forty full years of service to the University... I would like to have the privilege of continuing my service until I have rounded out the forty years, retiring at the age of seventy-five.

To support his request, Blackmar reminded the chancellor of three university professors who, while in their 70s, each served the university for at least forty years. He also wrote:

Under these conditions, I would not wish to take the initiative in making any request, concessions or arrangements regarding my retirement at the end of the next academic year. I feel that my personal point of view urges me to continue in the service as long as the work is well done.

Blackmar continued to publish (e.g., 1926e, 1926f, 1928, 1930) and teach sociology courses until 1929. On May 31, 1929 Blackmar sent Chancellor Lindley a handwritten note:

You talked so pleasantly and skillfully during our conference this morning that I omitted to present the enclosed request.

You said that I "never quit." It does seem so but I assure you that this is my last reference to the question under discussion, whichever way it is decided.

Attached to the note was Blackmar's handwritten request to the chancellor and board of regents:

Gentlemen:

Believing that I can render full and valuable service to the University, I am requesting you to grant me the privilege of teaching full time with full salary for the next academic year only, ending June 1930.

Professor Blackmar's request was denied and he was "put on the university's retired list"¹⁰ (*Lawrence Journal World* 1931).

IN RECOGNITION OF HIS SERVICES

Frank Wilson Blackmar died, after a short illness, on March 30, 1931, two years after his forced retirement from the university. He was 76 years old. On the occasion of Blackmar's death, the University of Kansas's Chancellor Lindley issued this statement (*Lawrence Journal World* 1931):

The death of Dr. Frank W. Blackmar removes one of the most distinguished members of the faculty of the University... An inspiring teacher, and a brilliant lecturer and writer,... his texts on sociology enjoyed extensive use in college classrooms thruout the country...

Owing to physical disability he had been for two years without regular teaching duties, although he gave a brief popular course on the Nature of Man which attracted good audiences and much favorable comment.

One of Doctor Blackmar's last published statements was an appeal to Kansas to repudiate the effort to establish capital punishment in this state.

Blackmar's contributions also were chronicled by Professor David Patterson (1931, p. 7) in the University of Kansas' *Graduate Magazine*:

In conference with his colleagues Blackmar was uniformly fair and just. It was one of his strong points as an administrator. Altho he

would fight for a cause he believed to be right... he bore no personal enmity towards those who opposed him. He was never vindictive...

Ernest Burgess (1932, p. 324), who worked under Blackmar for two years (1913-15) at the University of Kansas,¹¹ wrote the following:

...In the period that I knew him most intimately he was an influential leader of faculty opinion and was particularly effective in faculty meetings, respected both for his independence and soundness of judgment and for his skillful discussion of proposals.

His greatest contribution to sociology was perhaps through his teaching in his classroom and in his writings. He was a stimulating and inspiring teacher...

To his many friends he was... a man with a rare mingling of dignity and democracy, who loved a fight provided it was for a righteous cause, who had unusual practical insight into human nature, and who, often against great odds upheld to students and to the public, ideals and standards of service and efficiency.

When a faculty member dies, one expects university spokespersons or those writing in university publications to write flattering, uncritical statements. Similarly, sociologists who chose to write about Blackmar in sociology publications had many good things to say. But readers may notice in the latter case some possible slights or omissions which may indicate reality or reflect the writer's biases or the tone of the time. Melvin Vincent (1931), for instance, discusses in various ways Blackmar's "older point of view."

Frank W. Blackmar gave 40 years of service to his university, but struggled in the end to retain his faculty position. A paper trail reveals some events during his last years, but not enough to allow us to answer some basic questions. For instance, did the faculty in 1925 unfairly judge Blackmar? Were "age discrimination" and/or "the aging process" factors in this scenario? Was Blackmar motivated to retain his position mainly because he wanted to teach? Or was he most intent on continuing to receive an adequate salary or remaining actively attached to a university?

Until recently, histories have given us little information about Blackmar's accomplishments and even less about his struggles. This account of his last years at the university--years which were unsettling and perhaps painful--may rekindle interest in Blackmar's many contributions. And even though these events took place more than 60 years ago, many of the issues connected with his retirement are contemporary ones. The recounting of these events may inspire us to review the retirement practices within our own institutions.

ENDNOTES

1. According to historian Carl Becker (1960, pp. 344-45) in a piece originally published in 1910, "Kansas has been subjected, not only to the ordinary hardships of the frontier, but to a succession of reverses and disasters that could be survived only by those for whom defeat is worse than death... To the border wars succeeded hot winds, droughts, grasshoppers; and to the disasters of nature succeeded in turn the scourge of man, in the form of "mortgage fiends" and a contracting currency... Those who remained in Kansas from 1875 to 1895 must have originally possessed staying qualities of no ordinary sort..."
2. Ernest Burgess (1932, pp. 324-25) thought "the two works which are most likely to constitute (Blackmar's) permanent contribution to social science are his two early studies, *Spanish Colonization* and *Spanish Institution(s) in the Southwest*. These books were published in 1890 and 1891.
3. According to Clark (1965, p. 91), "In later years when sociology was thoroughly established as a discipline, Blackmar took pride in claiming to have established the first department in an American university that bore the name of sociology as part of its official title. Professor Small, whose Department at the University of Chicago was launched in 1892-93, becoming the first to be devoted exclusively to Sociology, agreed to Blackmar's claim.
However, the question arises as to what actually constitutes a department... We must conclude, then, that only if chair be equated with department, can the founding date of KU's Sociology Department be accepted as 1889. Moreover, the chair was not exclusively devoted to the discipline of sociology, a fact that might further invalidate Blackmar's claim."
4. The decision to establish a press at the University of Kansas was made in 1946 (*Kansas City Star* 1947).
5. The "practical sociology" of the early 1900s (Barnes 1948, p. 741) is now referred to as "sociological practice." This general label includes two areas--clinical sociology and applied sociology. Clinical sociology is the creation of new systems as well as the intervention in existing systems for purposes of assessment and/or change. Clinical sociologists are humanistic scientists who are multidisciplinary in approach. They engage in planned social change efforts by focusing on one system level (e.g., interpersonal, community, international) but integrate levels of focus in their work and do so from a sociological frame of reference. The applied sociologist is a research specialist who produces information that is useful in resolving problems in government, industry and other practice settings. Among the approaches used by applied sociologists: needs assessment,

program evaluation and social impact assessment. A sociologist may work only in an academic or a practice setting or may combine academic, clinical and/or applied activities.

6. I appreciate the assistance of John Nugent and the other staff members of the University Archives at the University of Kansas.
7. Among the more well-known dismissals are those of W.E.B. Du Bois from Atlanta University and W.I. Thomas from the University of Chicago.
8. Ernest Burgess (1932, p. 324) thought that Blackmar was "perhaps best known" for this volume which Melvin Vincent (1931, p. 503) has characterized as one which "long held first place amongst introductory texts." Blackmar's coauthor, John L. Gillin, was identified by Barnes (1948, p. 741) as part of "the largest group of sociologists... usually called 'social economists' or 'practical sociologists.'"
9. Carroll D. Clark received the M.A. degree in sociology from the University of Kansas in 1925 and was a full-time instructor from 1925-1927. He received his PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago in 1931. Clark returned to the University of Kansas faculty in 1930 and was chair of the department when Blackmar died. At that time V.E. Helleberg and Seba Eldridge were still with the department but Delbert Mann and Stuart Queen had left.
10. The university put a retirement benefits structure in place in 1944 (Griffin 1974, p. 537). When Blackmar was retired in 1929, he was listed as a half-time instructor with no department affiliation. He received \$2100 a year.
11. Burgess, the first to teach courses in clinical sociology (Fritz 1990a, 1990b), and Blackmar co-authored the *Lawrence Social Survey* (1917). Blackmar directed the "Social Surveys Series" and this was the second publication in that series.

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A METATHEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIOECONOMICS*

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A good portion of the current debate over socio-economics and economic sociology has been framed in metatheoretical, particularly paradigmatic, terms. Having done a good deal of work in metatheory in general (Ritzer 1988, 1989b, 1990c), and paradigm analysis in particular (Ritzer 1975, 1981), I would like to address the current work in socio-economics, especially Amitai Etzioni's (1988) *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics*, from those points of view. Such a metatheoretical examination should allow us to better understand these works, their objectives, and their strengths and weaknesses.

IS EVERYTHING A PARADIGM?

Since the term paradigm is bandied about by many of the new socio-economists, we are entitled to ask precisely what they mean when they use that term and whether socio-economics can be seen as a new paradigm (or a theoretical component of a paradigm). Those who use the paradigm concept leave themselves open to a wide range of criticisms. The basic source of the problem is ambiguities in Kuhn's (1962) original work on the paradigm concept, as was well documented by Masterman (1970) who enumerated 21 different uses of the concept in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Stung by the critics, Kuhn (1970) later tried to give the paradigm concept more specificity by defining it as an exemplar, or a concrete solution to a scientific puzzle. However, many observers felt that Kuhn had done a disservice to the basic thrust of his original work by limiting the paradigm concept in this way. Their view was that the truer meaning(s) of the paradigm concept was to be found in his earlier, more ambiguous work.

The latter view, of course, leaves considerable latitude in how one uses the paradigm concept. As someone who has been criticized for using the concept too loosely (Eckberg and Hill 1979), I am loathe to critique the new socio-economists on this ground. However, even I am tested by the wide range of things that they call a paradigm. Take, for example, Swedberg's (1989) notion of the sociological paradigm (*homo sociologicus*). For one thing, this implies that there was, or is, a single, dominant sociological paradigm. No analyst of sociology from a paradigmatic perspective has ever come to such a conclusion; sociology is *always* seen as multi-paradigmatic (Friedrichs 1970; Effrat 1972; Ritzer 1975; Hirsch, Michaels and Friedman 1987, p. 318). More specifically, Swedberg sees the sociological paradigm as, among other things,

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